

North Hill

Commentary... Golf and Long Range Planning

By SELECTMAN JIM MURPHY

As all of you know, the selectmen are recommending that the Town expand the current 9 hole golf course at North Hill to 18 holes. Much time and effort has been put into studying the merits of the expansion and there is opposition to the idea from a group of citizens who wish the area to remain in its virgin state. The Board respects their opinion and understands their passion for preservation. The selectmen, however, must take into consideration the needs of the Town as a whole. Incidentally, the expansion of North Hill is preservation of open space and the revenue it will generate will help us address many other issues which we must face as your executive body. It is from this perspective that we are recommending the expansion of North Hill. We believe the expansion is another piece of the puzzle we are trying to solve to preserve Duxbury as a rural community with a tax base that is 96% residential.

As many of you know, we began the process of developing a long range plan for the Town this year. While the process is in its nascency, several things have become clear. The community wants excellent schools, very good police and fire protection, clean drinking water, preservation of the beach, maintenance of recreational facilities and professional management of town government. The community wants all of this without changing the rural nature of Duxbury or increasing property taxes. The selectmen agree with all of these goals and is searching for ways to accomplish all of this without overburdening the residential taxpayers. This is the difficult part.

The very nature of Duxbury and its quality of life attracts young families to our community and our zoning by-law is currently designed to continue the growth of the Town residentially and not commercially. If we continue to attract young families to the community, the long-term implications from a financial perspective are frightening. Focusing on the cost of education alone and ignoring all of the other services the Town provides, the ramifications of more single family development become evident. We currently spend over \$5,000 per student on education. If you assume that each 4 bedroom home built in town will house 2 students and that the average tax bill for that home approximates \$5,000, the Town has a built in deficit before considering all other Town services of \$5,000 per new home constructed. We must therefore make up this difference either in additional taxes, additional revenue from fees and fines, additional State Aid, or other sources of revenue.

One approach to our dilemma which has the benefit of generating revenue and maintaining the residential character of the Town is to zone for more retirement housing. Senior housing such as the Village at Duxbury requires little in the way of town services, adds no burden on our schools, and is an excellent source of revenue. The attraction of Duxbury to seniors stems from the variety of benefits we offer as a community. These include, the beach, boating, the Art Complex, the Conservatory, and hopefully our new library. An 18 hole golf course would be another attraction to retirees for Duxbury. While some claim that the existing 9 holes is adequate and only needs fixing up, the course is clogged by people playing twice to get in 18 holes. This is unpalatable to many golfers who simply play elsewhere. Unless we can accommodate these people, we will never maximize the revenue potential of the course.

Rather than being a fiscal drag on our taxes, the golf course will be a revenue generator and will produce over \$250,000 annually after debt payments shortly after opening. It enhances the residential character of Duxbury and takes only 90 acres of the over 1,800 acres of land we already own for preservation. Contrary to opposition misstatements of fact about our aquifer and environment, it will not harm either. As stated above we think that golf courses are open space and in this case will make the land in question useable by a large number of families in town. We are planning for our future in ways we think make sense but we need your support and your vote at Town Meeting. Come on Saturday, March 11 and vote in favor of the expansion of North Hill.